

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 005098

SIPDIS

CENTCOM FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/23/2025

TAGS: [PGOV 12](#)

SUBJECT: SERIOUS NEGOTIATIONS ON GOVERNMENT FORMATION NOT
UNTIL AFTER CERTIFICATION OF RESULTS

Classified By: PolCouns Robert S. Ford, reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) Summary: Hussein Shahrستاني, a leading independent in the strong Shia Islamist bloc, told us December 23 that the bloc is unlikely to settle on its prime minister candidate for another week or two. He thought it possible a dark horse independent might emerge as a compromise choice given the intense rivalry between Prime Minister Jafari and Deputy President Abd al-Mahdi. Shahrستاني said the Shia bloc has already contacted both Kurds and the Sunni Arab Tawaffuq bloc about forming a national unity government. He doubted these contacts would deepen into serious negotiations until the final election results are announced. He agreed with PolCouns recommendation that the Shia bloc avoid harsh rhetoric while the election commission investigations allegations of electoral fraud and pledged that the Shia bloc would accent the need for national unity and reconciliation. End Summary.

Negotiations Must Wait

2. (C) First Deputy Speaker of the Transitional National Assembly (TNA) and leading Shia independent Dr. Hussein Shahrستاني told Poloffs December 23 that serious negotiations on government formation will not begin until the election results are certified. He estimated this meant not before the end of the first week of January. The Shia Alliance has appointed delegations to begin negotiations with the Kurdish Alliance and Tawaffuq, but these have not progressed beyond phone calls. (Shahrستاني said that he has been appointed to the negotiating teams for both Kurds and Sunni Arabs.) He added that, unlike the January elections, the negotiations will be by party blocs, not by sectarian divisions (Comment: The party blocs are all sectarian, so there will be no difference).

Who Will Be Shia Islamist PM ?

3. (C) He said the Shia Alliance should be able to agree on their Prime Minister candidate before the results are certified in early January. They should be able to agree on a consensus choice, but, if not, their parliamentarians will vote for their selection. He said the 555 List will hold a meeting on December 26 to launch the selection process. Shahrستاني agreed with the assessment that the Shia independents will play a swing role in the selection. He added that the independents might well prefer a third choice for PM (a not so subtle reference to himself), as opposed to PM Jafari and VP Abd al-Mahdi

4. (C) Shahrستاني fished a bit by observing good naturedly that the Americans appeared to be disappointed by the strong showing of the Shia Islamist 555 list. PolCouns countered that many observers, including in the U.S., had anticipated the 555 list would be the strongest bloc. The U.S. now looks to the list to demonstrate leadership by moving ahead to establish a broad-based and capable government filled with ministers who are qualified and can work for national unity. PolCouns underlined that ministers should not be appointed merely on the basis of political spoils. Shahrستاني readily agreed with all these points. (Comment: His agreeing is one thing. His acting in this direction is another. End Comment.)

Getting the Sunni Arabs to Yes

5. (C) When asked about the recent meetings of groups opposed to the election results, Shahrستاني said he did not understand the motives of parties like Tawaffuq and the National Dialogue that had no interest in the election results in the South. The

votes in the South were for the Shia Alliance or for Ayad Allawi, not the Sunni Arab blocs. When asked about the pre-election and election intimidation, Shahrستاني said it is important to distinguish between the organized supporters of the Shia Coalition and support from the masses over which they have no control. He said it would be a very serious matter if organized supporters were behind any attacks and the Shia Coalition leadership would take action. PolCouns told Shahrستاني that it was important for all parties to tone down their rhetoric while the election commission looked at complaints. Shahrستاني said the Shia Coalition had already decided four days earlier not to respond publicly to charges leveled against it.

16. (C) Shahrستاني said the Shia Alliance also had taken a decision not to file any official complaints since it would not affect the election results and would poison the government formation negotiations. He highlighted with us Kurdish pesh merga intimidation of Shia Turkmen and Arab voters in Kirkuk, Khaniqin (Diyala), and Tuz Khurmata (Salahadin). He commented that the Kurds also had bussed in thousands to vote in Tuz Khurmata and even set up tents with food and music on election day. He emphasized, however, that the List 555 would not complain publicly.

17. (C) Shahrستاني opined that the elections were like a census. The Sunni Arabs have seen they are no longer a majority in Iraq, especially in Baghdad, a city that they have always viewed as Sunni Arab capital. Meanwhile, the Kurds realized they are not a majority in Ninewa. PolCouns underlined that these shocks made all the more useful statements from the strongest political group, the Shia Coalition, that underlined the Coalition's desire for national unity and reconciliation. Shahrستاني agreed and said the Coalition would keep repeating that theme.

18. (C) Comment: Shahrستاني can often be prickly, but this time he was in a ebullient mood; he had the same seat count that we have estimated and he was very pleased. We think Shahrستاني truly does have ambitions to be Prime Minister; he almost got the nod in 2004. Shahrستاني's glee extended to Ahmed Chalabi's being shut out ("even I thought he would get one seat.") as well as other Shia independents like Ali Debagh. It was noticeable when he talked about forming a national unity government that he avoided each time any mention of bringing in the Allawi List 731 into discussions. End Comment.

KHALILZAD